



Russian River Biological Opinion Update – May 2013

The Sonoma County Water Agency is continually planning and implementing the Russian River Biological Opinion requirements. The following project updates provide a brief synopsis of current work. For more detailed information about these activities, please visit www.sonomacountywater.org.

Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement and Demonstration Project

- The Sonoma County Water Agency Board of Directors approved a contract for the construction of the remainder of the one-mile demonstration project. Hanford Applied Restoration & Conservation, out of Sonoma, will be constructing the project, with work projected to begin early-to-mid summer (depending on nesting birds).
- Site identification and outreach to landowners is underway for the second and third miles of habitat enhancement.
- Design consultant selection is underway for the second and third miles of habitat enhancement. Four firms submitted statements of qualifications, which are currently under review by Water Agency staff.
- The Water Agency, National Marine Fisheries Service, Department of Fish & Wildlife and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are working with consultants, ESSA, to develop clear success measures for habitat enhancement. The plan should be completed in early 2013.

Tributary Fish Passage and Habitat Enhancement Projects

- The 2013 monitoring season has begun, with fish traps located in Dry Creek, Austin Creek, Dutch Bill Creek, Mark West Creek and in the Russian River at Mirabel.
- Construction on the Wallace Creek project (the final tributary project) has been stalled due to lack of easement with one landowner. Other options are being pursued.

Mirabel Screen and Fish Ladder Replacement

- The 90% design is ongoing. On January 29, the Water Agency Board adopted the Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration.
- Major construction is estimated to begin in June 2014.

Russian River Estuary Management Project

- Staff is planning for the 2013 Lagoon Management Period, which begins May 15. Biological and water quality monitoring will begin in May. A draft adaptive management plan, largely the same as the 2012 plan, has been approved by the regulatory agencies.

- National Marine Fisheries Service approved the Water Agency's application for a new Marine Mammal Protection Act Incidental Harassment Authorization (IHA). The IHA was published in the Federal Register.
- A study of the jetty is underway. The purpose of the study is to determine if and how the jetty impacts the formation of the sand bar (barrier beach) and lagoon water surface elevation. While the historic assessment component of the study was completed at the end of 2012, field investigations have been postponed, until all appropriate permits have been acquired.

Fish Flow Project

Work is occurring internally on the preparation of the draft Environmental Impact Report for the Fish Habitat Flows and Water Rights Project. The EIR is being prepared by Water Agency staff, with assistance from consultants on some areas of impact analysis. A draft EIR is anticipated to be released in 2013.

Interim Flow Changes

- Staff submitted the 2013 Temporary Urgency Change petition to the State Water Quality Control Board. An order from the State Water Board is expected to be issued soon. Please note that the requested flows in the upper river are based on the rapid decline in Lake Mendocino levels (as discussed at the April WAC meeting) and differ from the minimum flows required in the Biological Opinion.
- The reports required under the 2012 Temporary Urgency Change Order were submitted to the State Water Board at the end of March.

Public Outreach, Reporting & Legislation

- A community meeting on the estuary will be held at the Monte Rio Community Center on Thursday, May 16, 6 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.
- Planning is underway for a community meeting in Dry Creek (July, with date TBD).
- Senator Boxer's Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) legislation contains language that would authorize the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to conduct work on Dry Creek.
- A Dry Creek Advisory committee meeting was held on April 3 at the Quivira demonstration reach. In addition, Mark Nechodem, California's Director of Conservation, visited the site in April.
- Several WAC & TAC members attended a tour of the coho broodstock program and the Quivira site on March 22.
- An April 22 article in the Press Democrat highlighted the work being done in Dry Creek this summer, <http://www.pressdemocrat.com/article/20130422/ARTICLES/130429905>.